

Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 045462

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP, BL

SUBJECT:LECHIN MEETING WITH ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY
LUERS

REFS: (A) LA PAZ 1503; (B) LA PAZ 1398

1. SUMMARY: ARA ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY LUERS MET WITH
MINISTER OF PLANNING AND COORDINATION LECHIN FEBRUARY 28
TO DISCUSS CURRENT ISSUES IN US-BOLIVIAN RELATIONS. DIS-
CUSSION FOCUSED ON AMERICAN PRISONERS IN BOLIVIA, TIN,
ANDEAN PACT AND BOLIVIAN VIEWS OF CHILE-PERU TENSIONS. END
SUMMARY.

2. LECHIN OPENED THE CONVERSATION BY CONVEYING THE BEST
WISHES OF PRESIDENT BANZER FOR THE SUCCESS OF THE NEW US
ADMINISTRATION. LECHIN NOTED BOLIVIA'S DESIRE TO REMAIN A
FRIEND OF THE UNITED STATES, AND STATED THAT HIS COUNTRY
LOOKS UPON THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION "WITH ADMIRATION AND
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GREAT HOPE." LUERS RESPONDED BY DESCRIBING THE USG'S INTER-
EST IN LATIN AMERICA,

3. US PRISONERS: LECHIN RAISED WHAT HE DESCRIBED AS THE
"SENSITIVE BUT NOT IMPORTANT" MATTER OF 35 US CIT PRISONERS
IN BOLIVIAN JAILS. LECHIN HAD MET WITH MININTERIOR PEREDA

HOURS BEFORE DEPARTING FOR THE US, AT WHICH TIME PEREDA NOTED THAT A "SLIGHT DELAY" HAD OCCURRED IN APPLICATION OF THE NEW NARCOTICS LAW TO THESE CASES. PEREDA ASKED THE USG TO HAVE "A LITTLE PATIENCE" IN THIS MATTER, SINCE THE NEW LAW WILL SOON BE FULLY IMPLEMENTED. HE PREDICTED THAT 50 OF THE US CITIZEN PRISONERS WOULD BE RELEASED WITHIN TWO TO THREE WEEKS. IN RESPONSE, LUERS SAID THAT GOB COOPERATION IN NARCOTICS MATTERS HAS BEEN VERY FINE; WE HAVE A JOINT INTEREST IN THE SUCCESS OF THIS PROGRAM. THE US GOVERNMENT DOES NOT WISH TO MIX ITS DESIRE FOR JUSTICE IN THESE CASES WITH THE FIGHT AGAINST THE DRUG TRAFFIC. LUERS UNDERLINED THE FACT THAT THE USG ONLY WANTS JUSTICE FOR ITS CITIZENS, AND DOES NOT SEEK TO INTERVENE IN BOLIVIA'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS. HE NOTED THAT THERE IS LARGE AND GROWING PUBLIC CONCERN OVER THE PRISONERS IN THE UNITED STATES.

4. TIN: AS HIS SECOND CONCERN, MINISTER LECHIN BRIEFLY REVIEWED RECENT US-BOLIVIAN DIFFERENCES WITHIN THE ITC, AND BOLIVIA'S CONCERNs OVER POSSIBLE GSA STOCKPILE DISPOSALS. HE PROPOSED THE PLAN OF ACTION OUTLINED IN REFTEL A, NOTING THAT BOLIVIA HAS THE SUPPORT OF OTHER PRODUCER NATIONS FOR SUCH A PLAN. LUERS STATED THAT EB ASSISTANT SECRETARY KATZ WOULD ADDRESS BOLIVIA'S VIEWS ON TIN AND OTHER ECONOMIC QUESTIONS.

5. ANDEAN PACT: RESPONDING TO A QUESTION BY LUERS, LECHIN STATED THAT BOLIVIA REMAINS HIGHLY INTERESTED IN THE ANDEAN PACT, DESPITE THE DEPARTURE OF CHILE. HOWEVER, BOLIVIA
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HAS STRONGLY PROTESTED TO THE JUNTA WHAT IT REGARDS AS UNEQUAL TREATMENT WITHIN THE PACT. LECHIN ADDED THAT BOLIVIA'S PROTESTS HAVE HAD THEIR EFFECT: A "TAILOR-MADE" PACKAGE OF BENEFITS WILL PERMIT THE COUNTRY TO BE ABSOLVED OF SOME OBLIGATIONS UNDER THE PACT, CERTAIN DEADLINES FOR LOWERING OF CUSTOMS DUTIES HAVE BEEN DELAYED AND SOME BOLIVIAN PRODUCTS WILL RECEIVE PREFERENTIAL ENTRY INTO PACT COUNTRIES.

6. CHILE-PERU TENSIONS: LECHIN EXPRESSED GOB CONCERN OVER RECENT TENSIONS BETWEEN CHILE AND PERU. HE STATED THAT TALKS OVER A POSSIBLE OUTLET-TO-THE-SEA FOR BOLIVIA HAVE STALLED BECAUSE OF PERU'S "DISGUISED VETO" OF THE CHILEAN PROPOSAL FOR A BOLIVIAN CORRIDOR. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, HE ADDED, THE ENTIRE ISSUE HAS REVERTED TO THE STATUS QUO ANTE. IN ADDITION, LECHIN EMPHASIZED BOLIVIAN FEARS OF POSSIBLE SOVIET AND CUBAN INFLUENCE IN PERU. LUERS EXPRESSED DOUBTS ABOUT ANY SIGNIFICANT CUBAN

INFLUENCE OVER PERUVIAN POLICY. LECHIN THEN STATED THAT BOLIVIA'S CHIEF CONCERN IS TO AVOID INVOLVEMENT IN ANY POSSIBLE WAR BETWEEN ITS WESTERN NEIGHBORS. "HE GOB IS DETERMINED TO AVERT MILITARY INVOLVEMENT BUT IS NOT CERTAIN THAT A VIOLATION OF BOLIVIAN TERRITORY CAN BE AVOIDED. LECHIN STATED THAT CONFLICT BETWEEN CHILE AND PERU ON BOLIVIAN SOIL COULD DRAW ARGENTINA AND BRAZIL INTO THE FRAY, THUS THREATENING BOLIVIAN INDEPENDENCE AND TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY. HE RECOMMENDED THAT THE USG STUDY THE ISSUE CAREFULLY, AND DO ALL IT POSSIBLY CAN TO PREVENT A CONFLICT WHICH COULD ENVELOP THE WHOLE SOUTHERN CONE. IN RESPONSE, LUERS STATED THAT THE NATIONS INVOLVED SHOULD SEEK RESOLUTION OF THEIR DIFFERENCES AMONG THEMSELVES, RATHER THAN BY TURNING TO THE U.S. TO RESOLVE THESE ISSUES. THE US IS LIMITED IN WHAT IT CAN DO, ALTHOUGH WE DO NATURALLY SHARE A CONCERN FOR PEACE AND SECURITY IN THE REGION, AS A MEMBER STATE IN THE OAS AND A SIGNATORY TO

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THE RIO TREATY. WE HAVE EXPRESSED OUR CONCERNS TO THE GOVERNMENT OF PERU OVER ITS ARMS PURCHASES, BOTH PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY. TO SPEND MONEY FOR ARMS IN LATIN AMERICA AT THIS TIME, IN VIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF THE REGION, IS ABSURD. PRESIDENT CARTER IS PERSONALLY CONCERNED OVER THIS ASPECT OF THE ISSUE, AND OVER THE ROLE WHICH US ARMS SALES MAY PLAY IN DIVERTING RESOURCES FROM DEVELOPMENT. BUT WE DOUBT AT THIS TIME THAT ANY LATIN AMERICAN STATE HAS PLANS TO ATTACK A NEIGHBORING STATE. IN PARTICULAR, WE SEE NO PROSPECT OF A WAR IN THE SOUTHERN CONE, IN THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE.

7. FYI: LECHIN CONFIRMED THE DEPARTMENT'S UNDERSTANDING THAT THE WORLD BANK CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON BOLIVIA WILL MEET IN PARIS IN THE FIRST WEEK OF MAY, RATHER THAN IN LATE MARCH AS REPORTED IN REFTEL B.

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